

05. The Progressive Era pt.I, 1895-1920

- Purpose: to gain an understanding of the diverse and influential reform movements of turn of the century America, known as Progressivism. Specifically:
 - Principles, sources, and protagonists of the Progressive movement
 - Critics and opponents
 - Progressive reform on the state level
 - The coercive side of Progressivism
 - Progressivism on the national level under Roosevelt and Taft
 - The landmark election of 1912
 - Progressivism under Wilson and its decline due to World War I
- Timeframe: ca. 1895-1920

1.1 The Progressive Movement

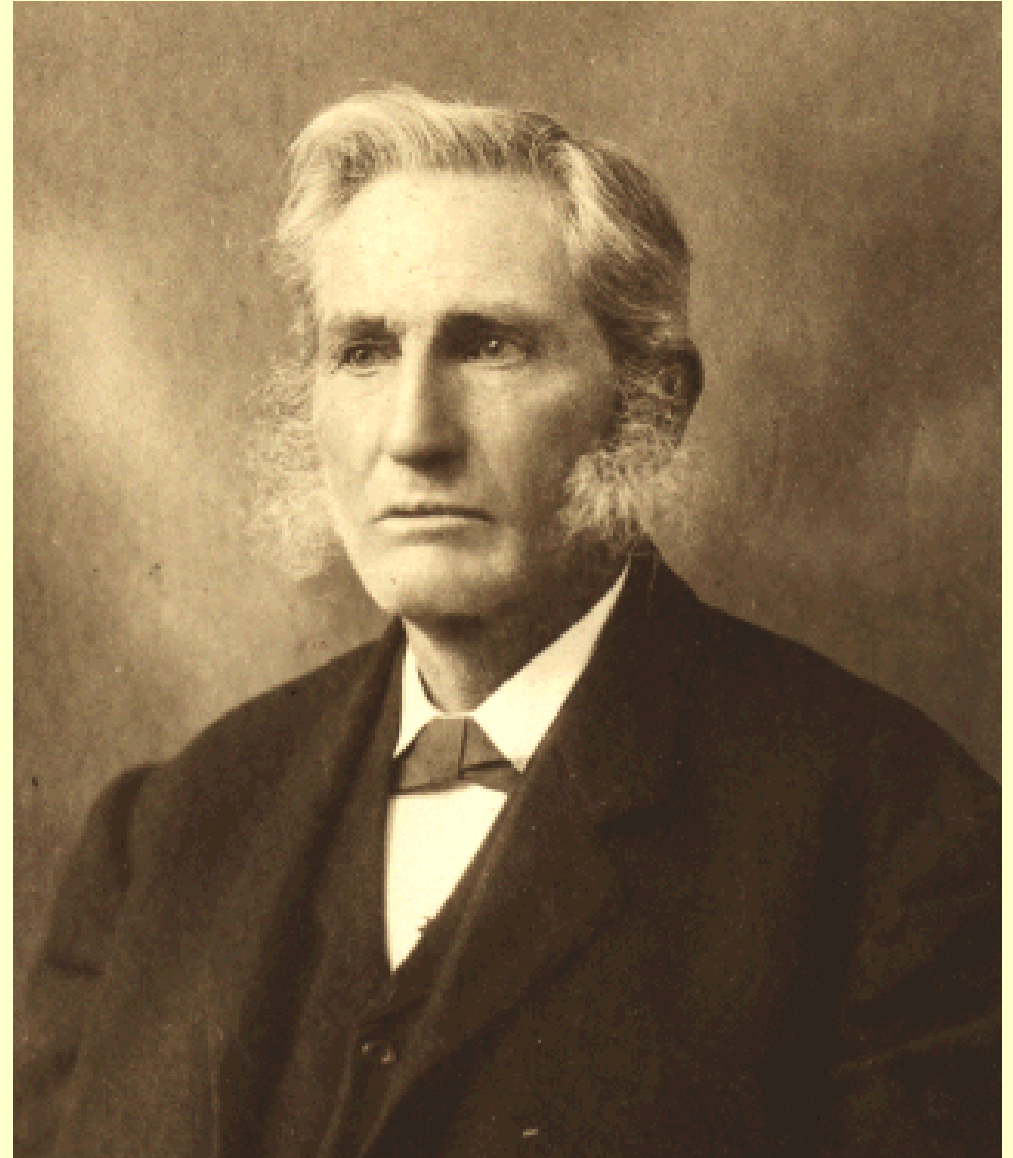
- Around the turn of the century, the Progressive Movement was a response to the challenges of industrialization, urbanization and immigration.
- Progressives turned away from the dominant laissez-faire doctrine. They believed in private initiative, but also that government should positively shape the economy and society and reform politics according to scientific principles.
- Progressives tended to see structural rather than individual causes behind problems. Hard work and thrift were obviously not enough to escape poverty.



Urban reformers like settlement house founder Jane Addams were at the vanguard of Progressivism

1.2 Origins of and Influences on Progressivism

- American reform traditions and voluntarism dating back to the early 19th century
- Populism: while Progressivism was primarily urban, it included many aspects of the Populist reform agenda.
- Foreign influences: esp. Victorian reformers in England, also German social social policy, French reforms. Many progressives had traveled Europe.
- Gilded age challengers of social Darwinism: Lester Ward, Edward Bellamy, the Social Gospel, etc.
- Science: scientific advances underlay the new industrial order; Progressives believed that such expertise would also solve the social problems of industrialism.



Lester Frank Ward (1841-1913), economist and critic of Social Darwinism

1.3 Who Were the Progressives?

- Progressivism was never a unified movement, but extremely diverse.
- Women played a major role.
- Most important: urban white native-born middle class, esp. white-collar professionals like engineers.
- Urban reformers of the 1870s and 1880s: settlement house movement, city beautiful movement, urban politics reformers, etc.
- Intellectuals, journalists, educators.
- Upper class reformers: some business magnates who went beyond philanthropy to a commitment to social justice.
- Working class reformers: a number of machine politicians also supported reform to help urban population. Often from immigrant backgrounds, like Al Smith of New York, a Democrat of Irish roots.



Alfred E. Smith (1873-1944),
machine politician and progressive reformer

1.4 Muckrakers

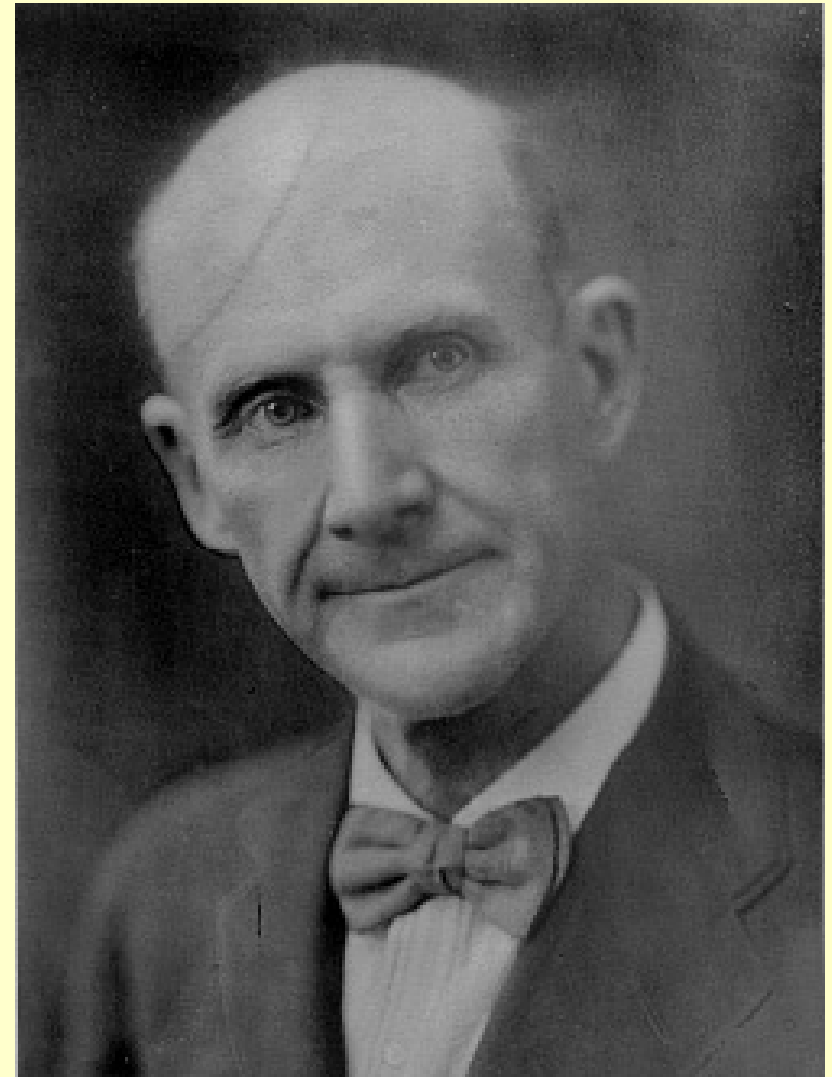
- Investigative journalists played a crucial role in exposing political corruption and corporate wrongdoing. Publication in magazines like McClure's, books.
- Th. Roosevelt disparagingly called these journalists "muckrakers," but the name stuck as a badge of honor.
- Lincoln Steffens *The Shame of the Cities* 1904. Exposed corruption of boss politics.
- Ida M. Tarbell *History of the Standard Oil Company* 1904. Corporate ruthlessness of America's most powerful monopoly.
- Upton Sinclair *The Jungle* (1906). Wanted to show the horrific working conditions in Chicago's meatpacking industry, but was read because of the graphic description of terribly unsanitary food production.



Upton Sinclair (1878-1968), muckraker and Socialist

1.5 Critics and Opponents of Progressivism

- Conservative politicians and business leaders argued that government regulation would undermine free enterprise and prosperity.
- Federal courts tended to limit government power to regulate. But never a complete blockade of reform.
- Socialists wanted a complete change of the system, not merely reform. Even so, Socialism and Progressivism overlapped on some issues.
- Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs won 400,000 votes in 1904 and nearly a million in 1912 as presidential candidate. Upton Sinclair, a famous muckraker, was not a Progressive but a Socialist.



Eugene V. Debs (1855-1926), labor organizer and Socialist Party leader. Jailed during World War I

2.1 Progressivism on the Municipal Level

- Progressive reforms began in the cities, with the various campaigns to eliminate the corruption of machine politics.
- In a number of cities in the 1890s, bosses were replaced with city managers or other forms of “expert” government.
- Regulation of urban utilities (water, gas, electricity). Some even advocated public ownership.
- City planning movement. Architect Daniel Burnham spearheaded a drive to restore the original plan for Washington DC with some success, and also made a new plan for Chicago to make it efficient and beautiful.
- However, municipal reforms were limited. Shift towards the state and federal level.



Daniel Burnham (1846-1912), architect and city planner

2.2 State Progressivism: Electoral Reform

- Progressive governors and senators. Robert M. Lafollette (Rep., WI); Hiram Johnson (Rep., CA); Woodrow Wilson (Dem., NJ); Theodore Roosevelt (Rep. NY); Hoke Smith (Dem., GA). Both parties had progressive wings, all regions had progressive movements.
- Electoral reform: initiative, referendum, recall; direct primaries. Important achievement: 17th amendment (1913): direct election of senators.
- By and large, these reforms failed to oust party bosses and special interest who learned to control the new mechanisms.



Hiram Johnson (1866-1945),
Progressive governor of California

2.3 State Progressivism: Labor Reform, etc.

- Labor reform was more successful.
- Factory safety inspection laws.
- Compensation for victims of industrial accidents.
- Child labor reform: minimum age for employment (12-16); maximum hours.
- Maximum working hours for women, protective regulations.
- Also early attempts at old age pensions and welfare support for mothers with dependent children.
- Limited success due to limited enforcement.
- Corporate regulation: "Wisconsin Plan." Direct primary, railroad regulatory commission, increased corporate taxes, campaign-finance limits, all aimed to limit the influence of special business interests



Robert M. LaFollette (1855-1925),
Progressive governor of Wisconsin

3.1 The Coercive Side of Progressivism

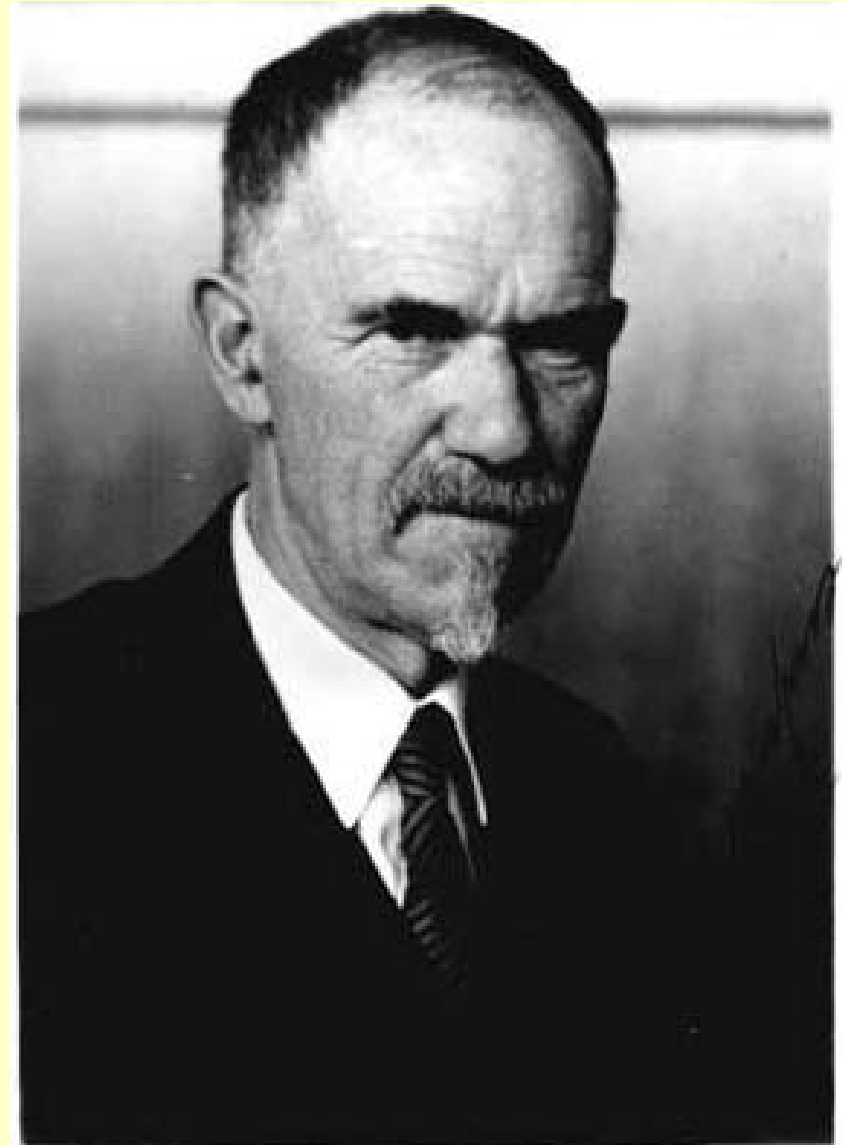
- Progressivism did not wholly shed the tendency of native-born protestant reformers to implement social and moral control.
- Several states set up censorship boards to control movies.
- Prostitution: Red-light districts like New Orleans' "Storyville" were shut down.
- "White Slavery": reformers tended to see prostitutes as victims of immoral pimps rather than perpetrators.
- 1910 Mann Act made it illegal to transport a woman across a state line for "immoral purposes." Also, venereal disease research, model municipal statutes against prostitution.



Theda Bara (1885-1955), the original "vamp." Sensuality in movies deeply troubled moral reformers

3.2 Immigration Restriction and Eugenics

- Some progressives believed that only fewer and “better” immigration could reduce the social problems of the city.
- Immigration Restriction League 1894.
- 1911 congressional study “proved” the “innate degeneracy” of the new immigrants. Full-scale restriction would follow after World War I.
- Eugenics: Some scientists believed society could be improved through genetic control. 1904 Carnegie foundation sponsored genetics research center. Director Charles B. Davenport was a racist, anti-Semite and for immigration restriction. A number of states legalized the enforced sterilization of criminals, sex offenders and the mentally handicapped.



Charles B. Davenport (1866-1944),
leading US eugenicists

3.3 The Prohibition Movement

- Temperance was the oldest and strongest American reform movement. Now, shift from individual temperance to the prohibition of alcohol.
- 1893 Anti-Saloon League: Run by full-time professionals, national office, conducted studies, printed campaign material. Typical progressive organization.
- 1900, 25% of Americans lived in "dry" counties or states. But: total per capita alcohol consumption on the rise.
- Cultural battleground: Protestant rural native-born reformers v. Catholic urban immigrants, for whom saloons were important institutions.
- WWI gave boost to prohibition. 18th amendment in 1919 outlawed manufacture, sale, and transport of alcoholic beverages.





LOSS OF SOCIAL STATUS.

LOSS OF SELF-RESPECT.

BAD COMPANIONS

SELF-ABANDONMENT.

LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT.

DECENT EMPLOYERS
REFUSE WORK.

FRIENDS TIRE
OF SUPPORTING HER.

FEAR
OF STARVATION

THE
EASIEST
WAY TO
GET DRINK

IMMORALITY

MAIN-
TENANCE.

EXCITE-
MENT.

UNFITNESS
FOR
WORK.

4.1 The Theodore Roosevelt Presidency

- In 1901 McKinley was assassinated and vice president Roosevelt, a NY reformer, assumed the presidency. He was the first progressive president.
- TR revitalized the presidency, taking a leading position in many reforms and pursuing an activist government.
- In 1902 mining strike, TR did not send troops. Instead, he summoned both sides to the White House and forced them to accept an arbitration commission.
- TR ridiculed arrogant business leaders and asserted political leadership. While not consistently pro-labor, he defended workers' right to organize.



Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919)

4.2 National Progressivism under Roosevelt

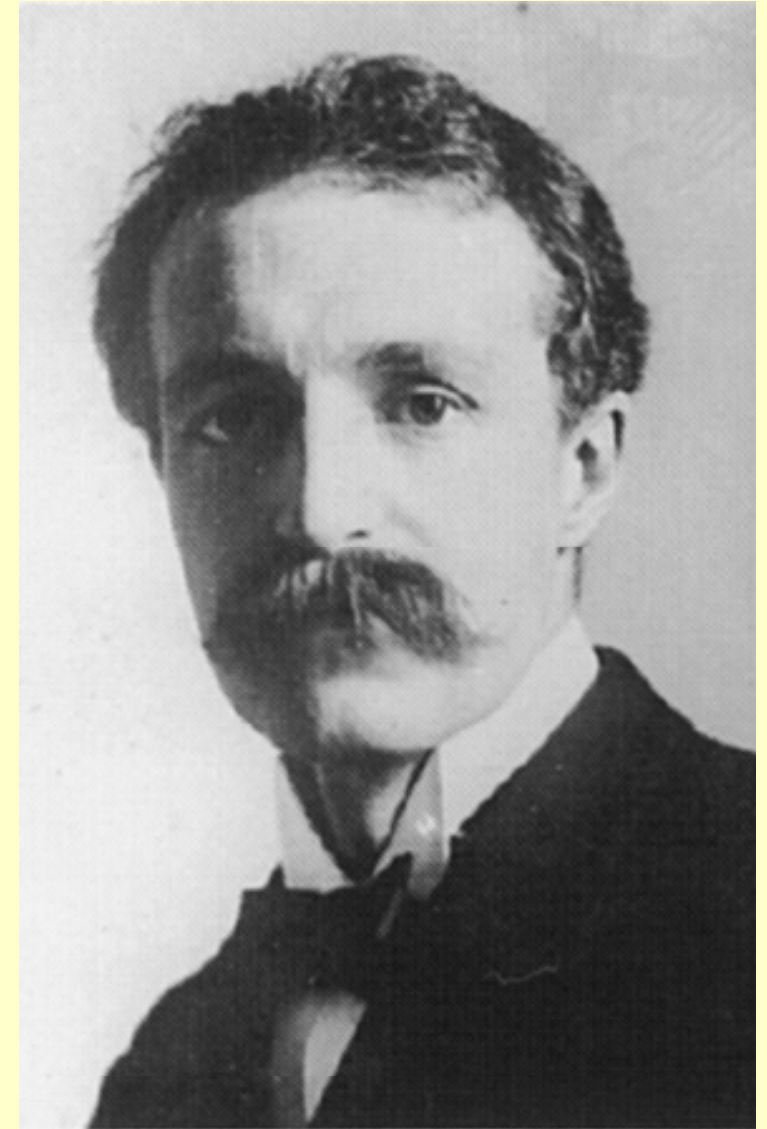
- With TR's (and many important reform legislators') help, progressive reform shifted to the national level.
- "Trustbusting." The TR administration gave the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 teeth and used it against monopolies. 1904 Northern Securities Company dissolved.
- TR did not wish not to destroy big business but to make it subservient to the public good.
- He made peace with the Republican big business wing in time for the 1904 elections, which he won in a landslide.
- Elkins Act (1903) and Hepburn Act (1906) gave Interstate Commerce Commission price-setting and enforcement powers. Railroad regulation finally became a reality.



. This cartoon from the November 4, 1906, St. Louis Post-Dispatch shows Roosevelt aiming a cannon at the oil trust. Standard Oil was broken up in 1911 by the Supreme Court

4.3 Consumer Protection and Conservation

- Meat Inspection Act (1906): response to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* imposed sanitary requirements for meatpackers.
- Pure Food and Drug Act (1906) outlawed sale of adulterated foods or drugs and required accurate ingredient labels. Esp. important for dubious patent medicines.
- During this period, heightened interest in natural resources and wilderness. Preservation v. Conservation.
- Both conservationists and preservationist opposed unregulated exploitation of nature and established environment issues on political agenda.
- TR sympathized with preservationists like John Muir of the Sierra Club, but called leading conservationist Gifford Pinchot to head the new US Forest Service.
- Many new national parks founded. 1916 National Park Service.



Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946)

4.4 The Taft Presidency

- TR did not run in 1908; William Howard Taft was his handpicked successor, who handily defeated William Jennings Bryan.
- Taft administration actually filed more antitrust lawsuits than TR's.
- The Mann-Elkins Act (1910) strengthened ICC railroad regulation.
- 16th amendment (ratified 1913) made possible a federal income tax. An old Populist demand, now progressive reform
- But: Taft made difficult compromises about the tariff and other issues, making many enemies in the party's progressive wing, esp. Lafollette. Taft also fired Pinchot, earning TR's ire.



William Howard Taft (1857-1930), US president and later Supreme Court Chief Justice

5.1 The Election of 1912 and the “Bull Moose” Party

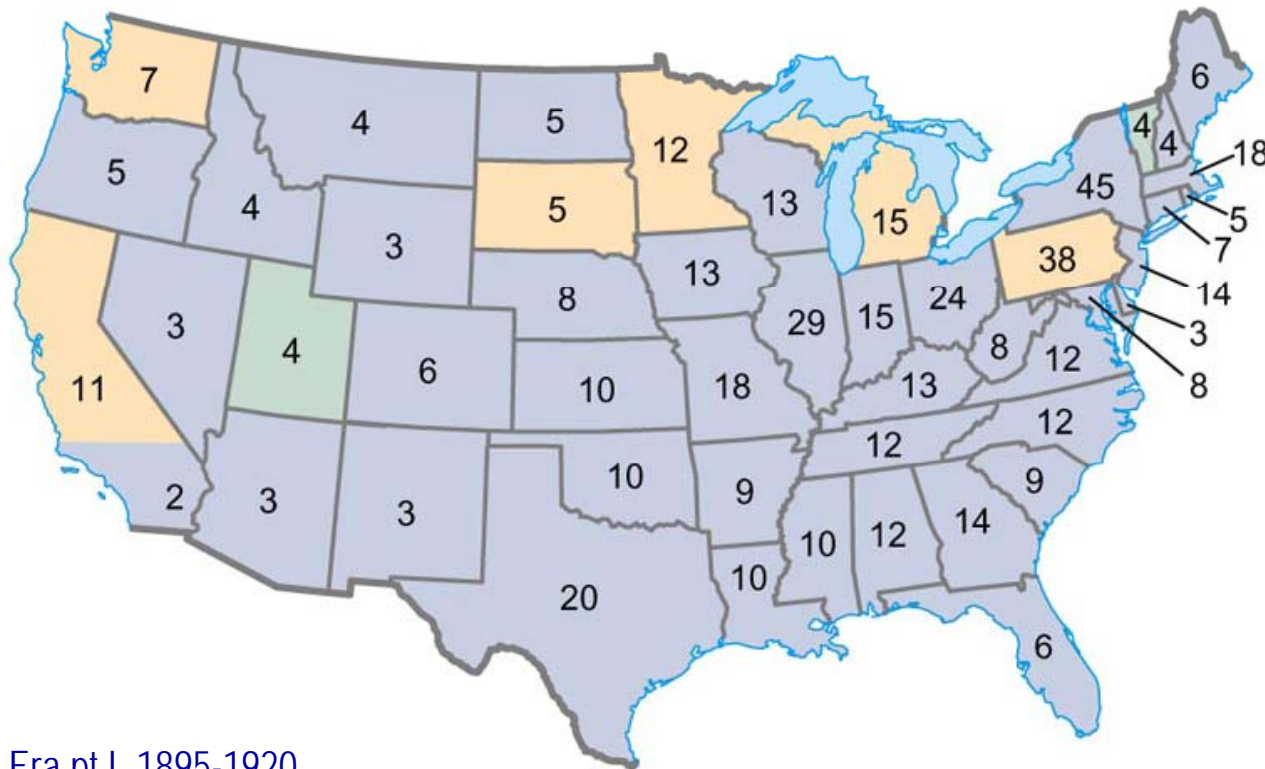
- In opposition to Taft, most of the Rep. Party's progressive wing broke off to form the Progressive Party in 1912. When Lafollette fell ill, TR assumed leadership of the insurgents: “I feel fit as a bull moose.”
- TR now much more radical than during his presidency. “New Nationalism:” strong government regulation of economy; federal direction of big business for the public good.
- Democrats ran progressive governor Woodrow Wilson of NJ. “New Freedom:” break up monopolies to empower individuals in a truly open marketplace.
- Republicans nominated Taft on a conservative platform.
- Socialists nominated Debs, at the height of his influence. Gained almost 1 million votes.
- Wilson won due to Rep. split.



Caricature showing TR and Taft, ripping apart the Republican Party

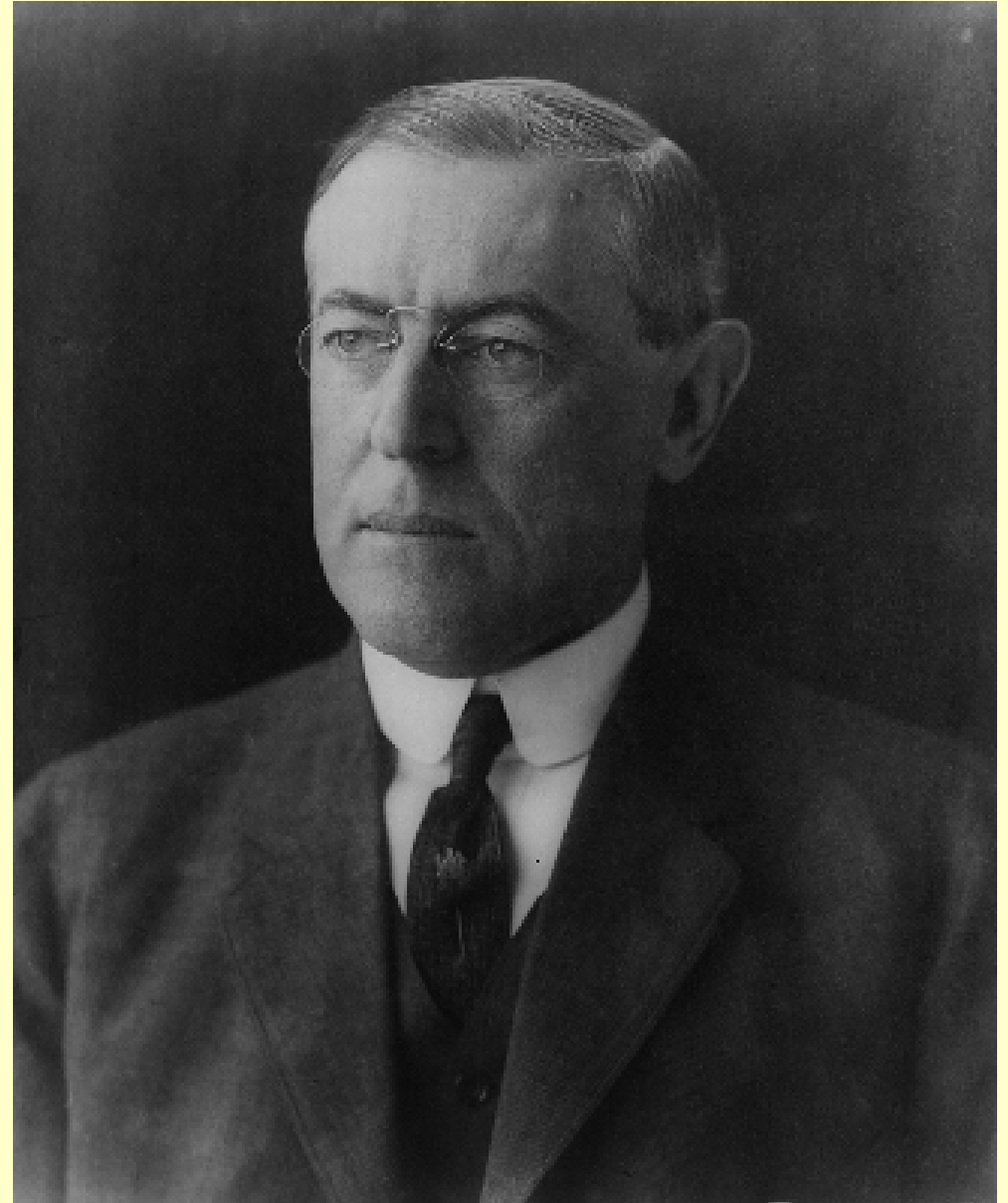
Election of 1912

Electoral Vote by State		Popular Vote	
DEMOCRATIC Woodrow Wilson	435		6,296,547
PROGRESSIVE (BULL MOOSE) Theodore Roosevelt	88		4,118,571
REPUBLICAN William H. Taft	8		3,486,720
MINOR PARTIES	—		1,135,697
	<hr/> 531		<hr/> 15,037,535



5.2 The Wilson Presidency

- A professor of political science, Wilson was one of the most intellectual men to serve as president in US history. He was also an extremely able legislative leader, getting Congress to pass much of his program.
- Federal Trade Commission Act (1914) established FTC to regulate against unfair business and trade practices.
- Clayton Antitrust Act (1914) was much more specific than older Sherman Act. More in keeping with the New Freedom idea, Wilson administration filed nearly 100 antitrust suits.
- Wilson supported a lower tariff. 1913 Underwood-Simmons cut rates by 15%.



Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924)

5.3 The Wilson Presidency, ctd.

- 1913 Federal Reserve Act created new central banking system for US: 12 regional currency banks under mixed public and private control. System exists to the present day.
- Keating-Owen Act (1916): outlawed interstate trade of products by child labor.
- Adamson Act (1916): 8 hour workday for interstate railway workers.
- Workmen's Compensation Act (1916): accident and injury protection for federal workers.
- Federal Farm Loan and Warehouse Acts (1916): farmers could use land or crops as security to get low-interest federal loans. Parts of older Populist demands.
- Wilson named Louis Brandeis, a leading progressive lawyer, as the first Jewish Supreme Court justice.
- 1916, an election year, was also the last major reform year. World War I increasingly overshadowed US politics and eventually pushed progressive reform off the national agenda. Wilson won the 1916 election only narrowly, despite his reform record. In the 1916 campaign, "he kept us out of war" was the most effective slogan.

Document Assignment and Sample Keyword

Document Assignment:

Document: Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1906)

Available online or from the folder in the library.

Sample Keyword:

Bull Moose Party

Nickname for the Progressive Party, which ran Theodore Roosevelt as presidential candidate in 1912. Consisted mostly of former Republicans like Robert Lafollette who broke off to oppose Taft whom they perceived as an obstacle to further reform. Endorsed TR's "New Nationalism" program. TR gained more votes than Taft but lost the presidency to Democrat Woodrow Wilson.